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Guilty: Trump becomes first former U.S. president convicted of felony crimes

By M. R. SISAK, J. PELTZ, E. TUCKER and M. L. PRICE

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump became the first former president to be convicted of felony crimes Thursday as a New York jury found him guilty of falsifying business records in a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election through hush money payments to a porn actor who said the two had sex.

Jurors convicted Trump on all 34 counts after deliberating for 9.5 hours.

The verdict is a stunning legal reckoning for Trump and exposes him to potential prison time in the city where his manipulations of the tabloid press helped catapult him from a real estate tycoon to reality television star and ultimately president.



Former President Donald Trump speaks to the media as he arrives at Manhattan criminal court during jury deliberations in his criminal hush money trial in New York, Thursday, May 30, 2024.

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Associated Press

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Guilty: Trump becomes first former U.S. president convicted of felony crimes

Continued from Front

As he seeks a return to the White House in this year's election, the judgment presents voters with another test of their willingness to accept Trump's boundary-breaking behavior.

Trump is expected to quickly appeal the verdict and will face an awkward dynamic as he seeks to return to the campaign trail as a convicted felon. There are no campaign rallies on the calendar for now, though he's expected to hold fundraisers next week. It will likely take several months for Judge Juan Merchan, who oversaw the case, to decide whether to sentence Trump to prison.

The falsifying business records charges carry up to four years behind bars, though prosecutors have not said whether they intend to seek imprisonment, and it is not clear whether the judge — who earlier in the trial warned of jail time for gag order violations — would impose that punishment even if asked. The conviction, and even imprisonment, will not bar Trump from continuing his pursuit of the White House. Trump faces three other felony indictments, but the New York case may be the only one to reach a conclusion before the November election, adding to the significance of the outcome. Though the legal and historical implications of the verdict are readily apparent, the political consequences are less so given its potential to reinforce rather than reshape already-hardened opinions about Trump.

For another candidate in another time, a criminal conviction might doom a presidential run, but Trump's political career has endured through two impeachments, allegations of sexual abuse, investigations into everything from potential ties to Russia to plotting to overturn an election, and personally salacious storylines including the emergence of a recording in which he boasted about grabbing women's genitals. In addition, the general allegations of the case have been known to voters for years and, while tawdry, are widely seen as less grievous than the



Former President Donald Trump appears at Manhattan criminal court during jury deliberations in his criminal hush money trial in New York, Thursday, May 30, 2024.

Associated Press

allegations he faces in three other cases that charge him with subverting American democracy and mishandling national security secrets.

Even so, the verdict is likely to give President Joe Biden and fellow Democrats space to sharpen arguments that Trump is unfit for office, even as it provides fodder for the presumptive Republican nominee to advance his unsupported claims that he is victimized by a criminal justice system he insists is politically motivated against him.

Trump maintained throughout the trial that he had done nothing wrong and that the case should never have been brought, railing against the proceedings from inside the courthouse — where he was joined by a parade of high-profile Republican allies — and racking up fines for violating a gag order with inflammatory out-of-court comments about witnesses.

The first criminal trial of a former American president always presented a unique test of the court system, not only because of Trump's prominence but also because of his relentless verbal attacks on the foundation of the case and its participants. But the verdict from the 12-person jury marked a repudiation of Trump's efforts to undermine confidence in the proceedings or to potentially impress the panel with a show of GOP support.

The trial involved charges that Trump falsified business records to cover up hush money payments to Stormy Daniels, the porn actor who said she had sex with the married Trump in 2006.

The \$130,000 payment was made by Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer Michael Cohen to buy Daniels' silence during the final weeks of the 2016 race in what prosecutors allege was an effort to interfere in the election. When Cohen was reimbursed, the payments were recorded as legal expenses, which prosecutors said was an unlawful attempt to mask the true purpose of the transaction. Trump's lawyers contend they were legitimate payments for legal services.

Trump has denied the sexual encounter, and his lawyers argued during the trial that his celebrity status, particularly during the 2016 campaign, made him a target for extortion. They've said hush money deals to bury negative stories about Trump were motivated by personal considerations such as the impact on his family and brand as a businessman, not political ones. They also sought to undermine the credibility of Cohen, the star prosecution witness who pleaded guilty in 2018 to federal charges related to the payments, as driven by personal animus toward Trump as well as fame and money.

The trial featured more than four weeks of occasionally riveting testimony that revisited an already well-documented chapter from Trump's past, when his 2016 campaign was threatened by the disclosure of an "Access Hollywood" recording that captured him talking about grabbing women sexually without their permission and the prospect of other stories about Trump

and sex surfacing that would be harmful to his candidacy. Trump himself did not testify, but jurors heard his voice through a secret recording of a conversation with Cohen in which he and the lawyer discussed a \$150,000 hush money deal involving a Playboy model, Karen McDougal, who has said she had an affair with Trump: "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?" Trump was heard saying on the recording made by Cohen.

Daniels herself testified, offering at times a graphic recounting of the sexual encounter she says they had in a hotel suite during a Lake Tahoe golf tournament. The former publisher of the National Enquirer, David Pecker, testified about how he worked to keep stories harmful to the Trump campaign from becoming public at all, including by having his company buy McDougal's story.

Jurors also heard from Keith Davidson, the lawyer who negotiated the hush money

payments on behalf of Daniels and McDougal.

He detailed the tense negotiations to get both women compensated for their silence but also faced an aggressive round of questioning from a Trump attorney who noted that Davidson had helped broker similar hush money deals in cases involving other prominent figures.

But the most pivotal witness, by far, was Cohen, who spent days on the stand and gave jurors an insider's view of the hush money scheme and what he said was Trump's detailed knowledge of it.

"Just take care of it," he quoted Trump as saying at one point.

He offered jurors the most direct link between Trump and the heart of the charges, recounting a meeting in which they and the then-chief financial officer of Trump Organization described a plan to have Cohen reimbursed in monthly installments for legal services.

And he emotionally described his dramatic break with Trump in 2018, when he decided to cooperate with prosecutors after a decade-long career as the then-president's personal fixer.

"To keep the loyalty and to do the things that he had asked me to do, I violated my moral compass, and I suffered the penalty, as has my family," Cohen told the jury.

The outcome provides a degree of vindication for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, who had characterized the case as being about election interference rather than hush money and defended it against criticism from legal experts who called it the weakest of the four prosecutions against Trump.

But it took on added importance not only because it proceeded to trial first but also because it could be the only one of the cases to reach a jury before the election.

The other three cases — local and federal charges in Atlanta and Washington that he conspired to undo the 2020 election, as well as a federal indictment in Florida charging him with illegally hoarding top-secret records — are bogged down by delays or appeals. □

Roberts rejects Senate Democrats' request to discuss Supreme Court ethics and Alito flag controversy

By MARK SHERMAN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

Chief Justice John Roberts on Thursday declined an invitation to meet with Democratic senators to talk about Supreme Court ethics and the controversy over flags that flew outside homes owned by Justice Samuel Alito.

Roberts' response came in a letter to the senators a day after Alito separately wrote them and House members to reject their demands that he recuse himself from major Supreme Court cases involving former President Donald Trump and the Jan. 6 rioters because of the flags, which are like those carried by rioters at the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

Senate Judiciary Chairman Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., a member of the Judiciary panel, had written Roberts a week ago to ask for the meeting and that Roberts take steps to ensure that Alito recuses himself from



Chief Justice of the United States John Roberts joins other members of the Supreme Court as they pose for a new group portrait, at the Supreme Court building in Washington, Oct. 7, 2022.

Associated Press

any cases before the court concerning the Jan. 6 attack or the Republican former president's attempts to overturn his 2020 election defeat. "I must respectfully decline your request for a meeting," Roberts wrote.

Justices decide for themselves when to step aside from cases, Roberts noted. Alito said he concluded nothing about the flags, both of which he said were flown by his wife outside their homes in Virginia and

New Jersey, required his recusal. Last year, Roberts declined to testify at a Judiciary Committee hearing on Supreme Court ethics, and he made mention of that Thursday in saying that chief justices only rarely

have met with lawmakers.

"Moreover, the format proposed a meeting with leaders only of one party who have expressed an interest in matters currently pending before the court simply underscores that participating in such a meeting would be inadvisable," he wrote.

Both Alito and an another conservative justice, Clarence Thomas, have rejected calls to recuse themselves from cases related to the 2020 election, which Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden. Thomas' wife, Ginni, supported efforts to overturn the election results.

Public trust in the Supreme Court is at its lowest point in at least 50 years.

Durbin's office issued a statement downplaying Roberts' concerns. Durbin's only interest "is restoring the credibility of the Court in the eyes of the American people," the statement said, adding that he would press efforts to pass an enforceable ethics code for the Supreme Court. □

NRA can sue ex-NY official it says tried to blacklist it after Parkland shooting, Supreme Court says

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

A unanimous Supreme Court on Thursday cleared the way for a National Rifle Association lawsuit against a former New York state official over claims she pressured companies to blacklist it following the deadly 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

Giving the NRA a new chance to prove its case, Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote that "the critical takeaway is that the First Amendment prohibits government officials from wielding their power selectively to punish or suppress speech."

The NRA said ex-New York state Department of Financial Services Superintendent Maria Vullo violated



The U.S. Supreme Court is seen, April 25, 2024, in Washington.

Associated Press

its free-speech rights during her investigation of NRA-endorsed insurance policies. The group had been working with insurance companies to offer its members Carry Guard policies that covered losses caused by firearms, even when the insured person intentionally

killed or hurt somebody. Critics have called the policies "murder insurance." In an unusual alignment, the NRA was represented in the case by the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Biden administration argued some of its claims should go forward.

"This is a landmark victory for the NRA and all who care about our First Amendment freedom," NRA attorney William A. Brewer III said, accusing New York government officials of abusing their power to silence the group.

Neal Katyal, Vullo's attorney at the Supreme Court, predicted Vullo would ultimately win the case. "Ms. Vullo did not violate anyone's First Amendment rights. Ms. Vullo enforced the insurance law against admitted violations by insurance entities," Katyal said in a statement.

The Supreme Court ruling favoring the NRA, which is based in Fairfax, Virginia, reverses a lower-court decision tossing out the gun rights group's lawsuit against Vullo. The decision

means the NRA's lawsuit can go forward, but it does not decide the merits of the claim. It also should not be read to shield the NRA and other advocacy groups from regulation, Sotomayor said. But, she wrote, the NRA's complaint "plausibly alleges that Vullo threatened to wield her power against those refusing to aid her campaign to punish the NRA's gun-promotion advocacy. If true, that violates the First Amendment." Vullo argued that she rightly investigated NRA-endorsed insurance policies. She said she did speak out about the risks of doing business with gun groups but didn't exert any improper pressure on companies, many of which were distancing themselves from the NRA on their own at the time. □

Biden is said to be finalizing plans for migrant limits as part of a U.S.-Mexico border clampdown

By COLLEEN LONG and
SEUNG MIN KIM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is finalizing plans for a U.S.-Mexico border clampdown that would shut off asylum requests and automatically deny entrance to migrants once the number of people encountered by American border officials exceeded a new daily threshold, with President Joe Biden expected to sign an executive order as early as Tuesday, according to four people familiar with the matter.

The president has been weighing additional executive action since the collapse of a bipartisan border bill earlier this year. The number of illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border has declined for months, partly because of a stepped-up effort by Mexico. Still, immigration remains a top concern heading into the U.S. presidential election in November and Republicans are eager to hammer Biden on the issue. The Democratic administration's effort would aim to head off any potential spike in crossings that could occur later in the year, as the fall election draws closer, when the weather cools and numbers tend to rise, two of the people. They were not authorized to speak publicly about the ongoing discussions and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The move would allow Biden, whose administration has taken smaller steps in recent weeks to discourage migration and speed up asylum processing, to say he has done all he can do to control the border numbers without help from Congress. The talks were still fluid and the people stressed that no final decisions had been made.

The restrictions being considered are an aggressive attempt to ease the nation's overwhelmed asylum system, along with a new effort to speed up the



President Joe Biden speaks during a campaign event at Girard College, Wednesday, May 29, 2024, in Philadelphia.

Associated Press

cases of migrants already in America and another meant to quicken processing for migrants with criminal records or those who would otherwise be eventually deemed ineligible for asylum in the United States. The people told the AP that the administration was weighing some of the policies directly from a stalled bipartisan Senate border deal, including capping the number of encounters at an average of 4,000 per day over a week and whether that limit would include asylum-seekers coming to the border with appointments through U.S. Customs and Border Protection's CBP One app. Right now, there are roughly 1,450 such appointments per day.

Two of the people said one option is that migrants who arrive after the border reaches a certain threshold could be removed automatically in a process similar to deportation and would not be able to return easily. Migrants were able to more easily return to the border if they were expelled under the pandemic-era policy known as Title 42. Under that arrange-

ment, Mexico agreed to take back some non-Mexican nationalities, including migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Migrants, especially families, claiming asylum at the southern border are generally released into the U.S. to wait out their cases. But there are more than 2 million pending immigration court cases, and some people wait years for a court date while they live in limbo in the U.S.

Anyone can ask for asylum regardless of whether they arrive illegally at the border, but U.S. officials are increasingly pushing migrants to make appointments, use a legal pathway that avoids the costly and dangerous journey, or stay where they are and apply through outposts in Colombia, Guatemala and Costa Rica.

The Biden administration has grown ever more conservative on border issues as the president faces ceaseless criticism from Republicans and there are large numbers of migrants crossing into the U.S. from Mexico who are not easily returned, especially as global displacement grows

from war, climate change and more.

The immigration authority that the administration has been looking to use is outlined in Section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. It gives a president broad leeway to block entry of certain immigrants into the U.S. if it would be "detrimental" to the U.S. national interest.

Senate Republicans last week again blocked a bill that would have enshrined some of the same efforts into law. The vote was meant to underscore GOP resistance to the proposal even as Republicans have clamored for more restrictions and argued that Biden has not done enough to stem the flow of migrants entering into the U.S.

The bipartisan bill had been negotiated for months and appeared, for a moment anyway, to be heading toward passage. It was even endorsed by the National Border Patrol Council and its president Brandon Judd, an avowed supporter of Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. But Trump, concerned about handing Democrats an

election-year win, called on Republicans to tank it, and they did.

White House officials did not confirm the expected executive order.

White House spokesman Angelo Fernández Hernández said the administration "continues to explore a series of policy options and we remain committed to taking action to address our broken immigration system."

"While congressional Republicans chose to stand in the way of additional border enforcement, President Biden will not stop fighting to deliver the resources that border and immigration personnel need to secure our border," he said.

Congress this year approved funding for a total of 41,500 detention beds and increased money for immigration enforcement and removal operations by \$1.2 billion over what the White House had initially requested. That included \$106 million in more funding for programs that monitor immigrants in the asylum system through phone apps and ankle bracelets, rather than through detention.

Those increases, negotiated after the collapse of the bipartisan deal, could pave the way for the administration to ratchet up immigration enforcement. Yet unlike legislative action that is binding, anything Biden does through executive action can be challenged in the courts, and will almost certainly be, so it is not clear whether or if the clampdown on asylum would begin. The administration was weighing other actions too, including faster and tougher enforcement of the asylum process.

The administration has generally paired proposed crackdowns with an expansion of legal paths elsewhere and was also planning to do so in the future, but not at the same time the new restrictions were announced, the people said. □

Massive police sweep across Europe takes down ransomware networks and arrests 4 suspects

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — Police coordinated by the European Union's justice and police agencies have taken down computer networks responsible for spreading ransomware via infected emails, in what they called the biggest-ever international operation against the lucrative form of cybercrime.

The European Union's judicial cooperation agency, Eurojust, said Thursday that police arrested four "high value" suspects, took down more than 100 servers and seized control of over 2,000 internet domains.

The huge takedown this week, codenamed Endgame, involved coordinated action in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Ukraine, the United States and United Kingdom, Eurojust said. Also, three suspects were arrested in Ukraine and one in Armenia. Searches were carried out in Ukraine, Portugal, the Netherlands and Armenia, EU police agency Europol added.

It is the latest international operation aimed at disrupting malware and ransomware operations. It fol-



Exterior view of the Eurojust building prior to a press conference in The Hague, Netherlands, Wednesday, Dec. 5, 2018.

lowed a massive takedown in 2021 of a botnet called Emotet, Eurojust said. A botnet is a network of hijacked computers typically used for malicious activity. Europol pledged it would not be the last takedown.

"Operation Endgame does not end today. New actions will be announced on the website Operation Endgame," Europol said in a statement.

Dutch police said that the financial damage inflicted

by the network on governments, companies and individual users is estimated to run to hundreds of millions of euros (dollars).

"Millions of people are also victims because their systems were infected, making them part of these botnets," the Dutch statement said.

Eurojust said that one of the main suspects earned cryptocurrency worth at least 69 million euros (\$74 million) by renting out criminal in-

frastructure for spreading ransomware.

"The suspect's transactions are constantly being monitored and legal permission to seize these assets upon future actions has already been obtained," EU police agency Europol added.

The operation targeted malware "droppers" called IcedID, Pikabot, Smoke-loader, Bumblebee and Trickbot. A dropper is malicious software usually spread in emails contain-

Associated Press

ing infected links or attachments such as shipping invoices or order forms.

"This approach had a global impact on the dropper ecosystem," Europol said. "The malware, whose infrastructure was taken down during the action days, facilitated attacks with ransomware and other malicious software."

Ben Jones, CEO at Searchlight Cyber, a company that provides intelligence on the dark web, hailed the operation as an example of how international cooperation can crack down on cybercrime.

"Where cybercriminals previously used their ability to operate across borders to evade the arm of justice, operations like Endgame coordinated across multiple jurisdictions demonstrate that this evasion tactic is increasingly untenable," Jones said in comments emailed to The Associated Press.

"Law enforcement's net is widening and the 'safe zones' for cybercriminal activity are becoming harder and harder to come by."

Dutch police said that the actions should alert cybercriminals that they can be caught. □

Global aid group asks warring forces to respect its neutrality with 24 of its aid workers killed

By JIM GOMEZ and

JOEAL CALUPITAN

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) —

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies asked state forces and combatants Thursday to respect its neutrality and work of delivering urgent humanitarian help to the most destitute in war and other high-risk zones, saying 24 of its aid workers had been killed so far this year mostly in the Gaza Strip.

IFRC President Kate Forbes, who is visiting the Philippines, said in a statement posted on X, formerly known

as Twitter, that two more of her group's aid workers, Palestine Red Crescent Society paramedics Haitham Tubasi and Suhail Hassouna, were killed Wednesday when their ambulance was hit west of Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city.

"I am heartbroken," Forbes said. "This is not okay. This must stop."

Palestinians reported heavy fighting in the border city Wednesday and Israel's military said it seized control of the entire length of Gaza's border with Egypt. The fighting in Rafah has already forced more than 1 million Palestinians to flee,

most of whom had already been displaced in the war between Israel and Hamas. They're seeking refuge in makeshift tent camps and other war-ravaged areas, where they lack shelter, food, water and other essentials for survival, according to the United Nations.

Forbes told The Associated Press in an interview in Manila Wednesday that governments should act responsibly and abide by the rules of armed conflict, including the Geneva Conventions, referring to the international treaties drawn up after World War II which contain the rules to prevent

war atrocities.

"My appeal to the governments would be, if your sig-

natures are in the Geneva Conventions, abide by them," Forbes said. □



Smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike in Rafah, Gaza Strip, Thursday, May 30, 2024.

Associated Press

Tens of billions of dollars in gold flows illegally out of Africa each year, a new report says

By JESSICA DONATI

Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) —

Billions of dollars in gold is smuggled out of Africa each year and most of it ends up in the United Arab Emirates, where it is refined and sold to customers around the world, according to a report published Thursday.

Over \$30 billion worth of gold, or more than 435 metric tons, was smuggled out of the continent in 2022, according to the report published by Swissaid, an aid and development group based in Switzerland. The main destinations for African gold were the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Switzerland.

The authors of the report said their goal was to make the trade in African gold more transparent and put pressure on industry players to do more to make gold supplies traceable and supply chains more responsible.

"We hope that this will improve the living conditions



Miners extract mud they hope contains gold at a gold mining site at which adults and youth work in the village of Mawero, on the outskirts of Busia town, in eastern Uganda on Oct. 18, 2021.

Associated Press

of local populations and the working conditions of artisanal miners throughout Africa," Yvan Schulz, one of the report's authors, told The Associated Press. The report found that between 32% and 41% of gold produced in Africa was not

declared. In 2022, Ghana was the largest gold producer in Africa, followed by Mali and South Africa, it said.

The UAE was by far the main destination for smuggled gold, the report said, with some 405 metric tons of un-

declared output from Africa ending up there. During a 10-year period between 2012-2022, that amount summed up to 2,569 metric tons of gold, worth around \$115 billion. The report said the gap between UAE imports and exports from Afri-

can countries has widened over the years, meaning that the amount of gold smuggled out of Africa appears to have increased over the past decade. For example, it widened from 234 metric tons in 2020 to 405 in 2022.

Switzerland, another main buyer of African gold, imported some 21 metric tons of undeclared gold from Africa in 2022, the report said. The real figure could be much higher if African gold imported through third countries was taken into consideration, the report said, but once gold is refined, it is virtually impossible to follow its flow to its final destination.

The United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, which contains detailed imports and exports statistics, shows that Switzerland is the main buyer of gold from the UAE. "Sourcing gold from the UAE is notoriously risky," the report said, describing the difficulty in ascertaining the origins of the refined gold. □

Slovenia's government endorses recognition of a Palestinian state, sends to parliament for approval

By ALI ZERDIN

Associated Press

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia (AP) —

Slovenia's government on Thursday endorsed a motion to recognize a Palestinian state and asked the parliament to do the same.

Prime Minister Robert Golob said that his government sent the recognition proposal to parliament, which could convene as early as next week.

"All the world should act in the direction of peace," Golob said after the government session. "The way to achieve peace is a two-state solution."

"The decision is not directed against anyone, not even Israel, but it is a message of peace," he added as the Palestinian flag was displayed on the government headquarters in Ljubljana.

ljana, the Slovenian capital.

Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz said he hoped the Slovenian parliament would reject the government decision.

"The Slovenian govern-

ment's decision to recommend that the Slovenian Parliament recognize a Palestinian state rewards Hamas for murder, rape, mutilation of bodies, beheading of babies, and strengthens the Iranian axis

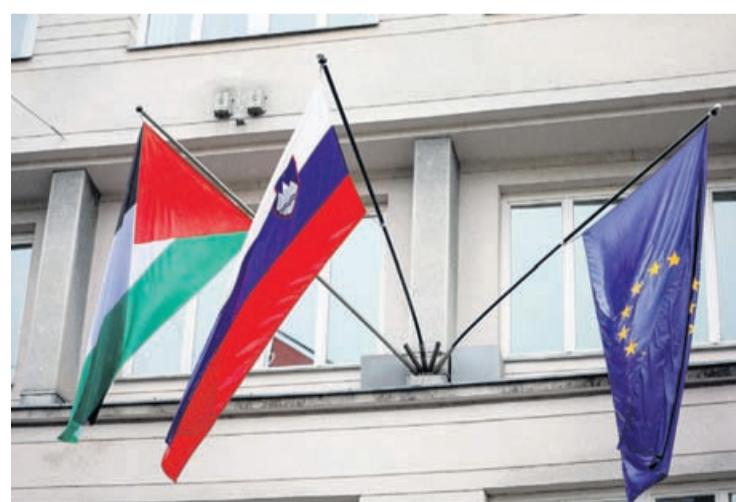
of evil while damaging the close friendship between the Slovenian and Israeli people," he said.

Parliamentary approval is necessary for the move to take effect. Golob's ruling liberal coalition has a comfortable majority in the 90-member assembly and the vote should be a formality.

The decision by Slovenia's government comes just two days after Spain, Norway and Ireland recognized a Palestinian state, a move that was condemned by Israel.

With its move, Slovenia is set to become the 10th member of the 27-nation European Union to officially recognize a Palestinian state.

Norway isn't an EU member, but its foreign policy is usually aligned with the



A Palestinian flag flies next to a Slovenian, center, and a European Union flag, right, at the government building in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Thursday, May 30, 2024.

Associated Press

bloc.

Slovenia first began the recognition process in early May, but said it would wait until the situation in the ongoing Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza improved.

Golob said this week that he was expediting the process in reaction to Israel's latest attacks on Rafah, which have caused more than 1 million Palestinians to flee.

More than 140 countries recognize a Palestinian state more than two-thirds of the United Nations.

The move to recognize a Palestinian state has caused relations between the EU and Israel to nosedive. Spain and Ireland are pushing for the EU to take measures against Israel for its continued attacks on Rafah in southern Gaza. □

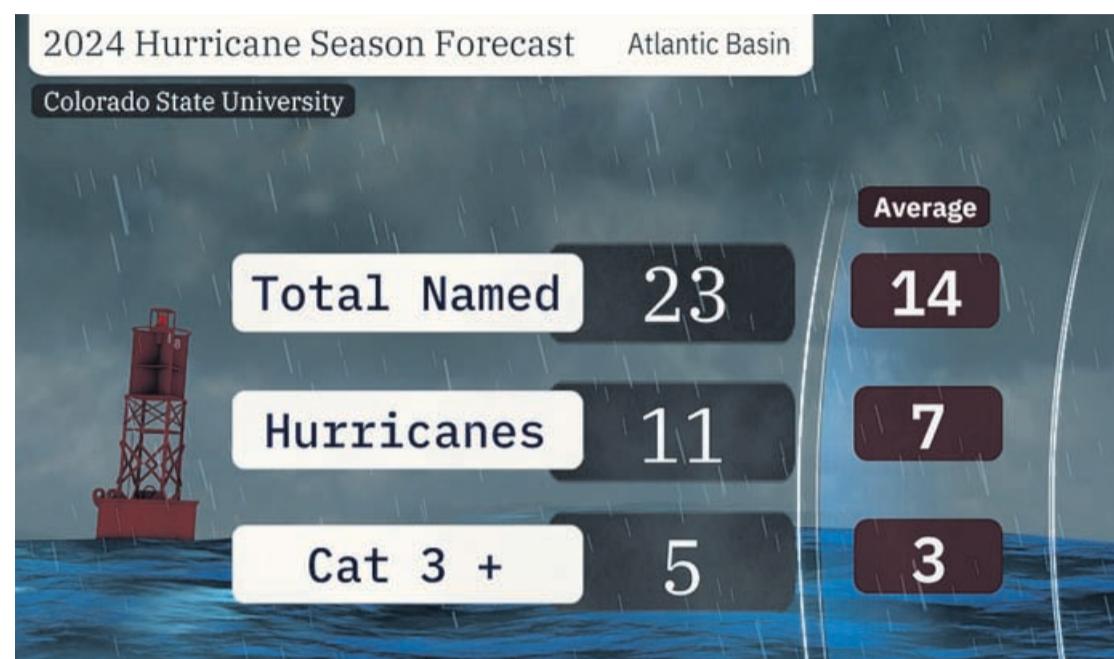
Meteo Aruba and CMO: "This Year Will See a Very Active Hurricane Season in the Caribbean"

The hurricane season is set to begin on June 1 and end on November 30. For this reason, yesterday morning, during a conference between Meteo Aruba and the Crisis Management Office (CMO), it was announced that this year will see a very active hurricane season according to reports from the National Hurricane Center and Colorado State University (CSU Tropical Weather & Climate Research).

Rodney Tromp from Meteo Aruba indicated that Colorado State published a report last month indicating that the hurricane season is expected to have a higher-than-average number of Named Storms, with an average of 14.4 storms where the season typically sees 23. For hurricanes, the average for this year is projected to be 7.2, with 11 hurricanes expected for 2024. Additionally, five major hurricanes are anticipated, and the days of Named Storms for 2024 are expected to be 115, which means "this year will see a very active hurricane season in the Caribbean, the Atlantic, and the region," Tromp assured.

Meteo Aruba monitors this data daily, with an eight-person team responsible for sending alerts "appropriately" to the community, ensuring they are informed and know what to do together with the CMO to guarantee the island's safety during this hurricane season.

Currently, sea temperatures in the region are quite warm, and they are considered to be "at the normal level," which means there is a lot of energy in the region. Tromp also commented that the El Niño phenomenon, a climatic event related to the warming of the Pacific Ocean, will switch to the La Niña phenomenon, characterized by cooling the surface waters of the central and eastern Pacific, which is favorable for hurricane formation, according to Tromp.



On the other hand, Tromp noted that they are working on a plan and if there is a threat, they will activate the plan immediately. He also mentioned that the situation in Aruba and Curaçao is different because Aruba's winds are stronger. "Curaçao has its local effects, and Aruba has its local effects. There are forecasts for the day and night, but during the hurricane season, when there is a threat, all (ABC) islands must coordinate with the Netherlands and the National Hurricane Center to issue a warning together."

Rino Geerman from CMO explained that it is expected that this year's hurricane season will be more active in the Caribbean region, with a higher probability of systems entering the Caribbean compared to previous years, which were kept out of the Caribbean due to the effects of La Niña, predicting an 85% increase in hurricane activity.

Aruba's biggest problem is rain, not wind, according to Geerman. History shows that out of 10 hurricanes, 8 are rain-related. "We started preparing for hurricanes after March 18, and we have dealt with the Netherlands to ensure Aruba is not left alone at the Kingdom level where various instances have already met."

Regarding how they alert Aruba, Meteo Aruba, Meteo Curaçao, and the Hurricane Center will have a meeting before issuing a

warning. "It is good to inform the community that as soon as a system reaches Barbados, the process will be activated, or 120 hours before we start the legal process of asking the prime minister for permission to put Aruba on alert, prepare our departments, and potentially inform the public 48 hours before the system passes over or near Aruba," Geerman said.

In 2024, they will try to ensure the community does not panic when they see a red flag on the internet. "Meteo is responsible for informing CMO, and we are not the same as Curaçao or Miami. Miami gives recommendations based on their expertise but cannot put Aruba on warning. Neither can Meteo Aruba. CMO, together with Cri-

sis, Government, and the council of ministers, makes the decision to put Aruba on warning and determine the steps we will take," Geerman pointed out.

By August, all current dilemmas will be resolved when the Early Warning System is installed in Aruba, providing information in four languages, as Geerman indicated.

"For those whose roofs are leaking, I recommend checking them carefully because this year will have a lot of rain. For those living in areas known to flood, be aware that this year will be more troublesome. During bad weather starting early in the morning, consider if schools will be closed and at what time," Geerman commented.

He also informed that by

today, Friday May 31st, the CMO, responsible not only for Aruba but also for the Dutch Kingdom, needs to prepare Sint Maarten, which is in the hottest hurricane zone, in case something happens there or in other islands north of Aruba, they can accommodate victims.

Regarding tourism, Geerman assured that ATA is part of the crisis team and receives all information. He confirmed that historically there has not been a direct impact on Aruba, but the problem is rain, which could start in June or July, saturating the ground and causing flooding in August with subsequent rains.

Given that different areas will be affected by the rains, Geerman said Aruba does not have large pumps and they will arrive in August at Marinierskazerne, "but again, Aruba needs to start thinking and it's time for us to start buying our own pumps."

When asked about the difference between previous hurricane seasons and this one, Geerman confirmed that during a full year, Aruba receives 300 millimeters of rain. This season, it is expected to be double, "meaning we need to prepare for 600 millimeters of rain."

All information from CMO or Meteo will be published in the local Aruba press. □



Lessons from our elders: Plants and fruits for medicinal use



(Oranjestad)—Though western medicine is now widely used for common illnesses and to keep our bodies healthy and happy, it is still very common in every household in Aruba (and around the world) to have staple home remedies that is passed on through generations. Here are some tips that our elders have passed on to us over the years.

Pineapple

Pineapple has more uses than topping it on your Christmas ham. According to elders, the skin of a pineapple is great to use to refresh your body. Clean the skin thoroughly and make tea or warapa* with it. It is said that this tea can also be drank after an operation on the ovaries or uterus. This gets rid of irritation and inflammation.

When the fruit is unripe and green, this can be used to stimulate menstruation flow in women. This also stimulates the passing kidney stones. When ripe, the fruit can be used for poisoning in the gut and can help treat rheumatic diseases, like arthritis.

However, breastfeeding women who cannot produce much milk are advised not to consume too pineapple, and people with acid reflux are recommended to not consume any pineapple at all.

Arrowroot

Arrowroot is native to tropical America and can be sold as a powder or whole. It is said that you can take arrowroot powder and make a "shalup" (porridge) for stomach pain or when you're feeling weak. You can make it with milk too, but it is advised to best use just water. You can also add prunes for a bit of sweetness. Arrowroot shalup is also good to treat an unhealthy gut or for diarrhea.



To make arrowroot shalup, boil a bit of water and add one tablespoon of arrowroot powder and stir continuously until you reach porridge consistency. If you make a shalup with milk, add a pinch of salt. Raw arrowroot powder can be used to powder babies.

Eggplant/Aubergine

Eggplants, or aubergines, are easy to find in supermarkets around the world and can be grown all year round on the island. Related to potato and tomato, eggplants are good to calm nerves. It can also be used to lower blood pressure, by steeping its leaves in boiled water

and drinking it. You can also make eggplant juice to help purify your blood. However, do make sure to drink slowly; let it mix with your spit and then swallow.

Eggplant kataplan* can also be used to treat skin tumors, abscesses and hemorrhoids. Eggplant kataplan can also be used externally to treat arthritis. □

*warapa: term referring to a water and sugar solution, a.k.a simple syrup.

*kataplan: porridge-like mixture used externally for wounds or parts of the body that are painful or swollen.

Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Franse Pas") remains a mysterious—and spooky—road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.

The history of the Frenchman's pass—and how it got its name—dates back to the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The French colonizers tried

to smoke them out of the caves, but the indigenous settlers ended up inhaling too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming the area of Spanish Lagoon.

There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker, trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night. Sometime after trying to hitchhike, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice and jumped in. But to his horror,

he noticed that the there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitchhiker braced for impact, but just when he thought the car might drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel. For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa Cruz. Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Everyone grew quiet, because they realized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.



Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them noticed the hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look, there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one

of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass contributes a lot to our culture of folkloric story-telling. □

Source: visitaruba.com

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Author and poet Frida Winklaar Domacassé receives her flowers during literary night at the national library of Aruba



During a colorful evening filled with music, dance, poetry, painting, and laughter, the National Library of Aruba, together with friends, companions, and art enthusiasts, celebrated Frida Winklaar-Domacassé. Winklaar-Domacassé is known as an admired author and poet for her literary works in which her love and deep interest in language are highlighted.

The enjoyable evening showcased a variety of arts touching on the themes of the love we have for our island Aruba, the origins and development of Papiamento, as well as our history during slavery times and

our indigenous ancestry.

Cultural manager and host, Mirto Laclé, began the literary night with a brief presentation on the life and works of Frida Winklaar-Domacassé, particularly focusing on her latest literary work, "Adrinka," which was recently presented in the Netherlands. "Adrinka" explores symbols with roots originating from Ghana and the Ivory Coast, which have similar meanings and reflect wisdom. In the same vein, other literary works were also highlighted, showcasing the impact and beauty of our Papiamento language.

The gathering also enjoyed other presentations, including art displays by painter and photographer Steve Francees; dances by the Club di Movimento group under the choreography of Samantha Westera-Juppa in cooperation with Vivian Maduro-Crespo; and poetry recitations by Ariana Koolman-Chirino, Aurelia Croes, and the Department of Culture's own John-Freddy Montoya. Additionally, there were songs by Karina Maduro and live music by the band Ash & Friends. It is worth mentioning that during the event, each artist was also honored with a plaque, through which the National

Library of Aruba expressed their appreciation for their contributions to the world of art in Aruba.

This gathering, although not attended by a large audience, was filled with laughter and enjoyment, and emphasized the importance of not only our art and literature but especially the influence we receive from all parts of the Caribbean and beyond. "There are ties (from other cultures) that bind us to the Caribbean in every sense, but we see it more culturally, in terms of education, literature, linguistics, and creativity," Laclé expressed. □

Alto Vista chapel and its link to Aruba's origins

According to Etnia Nativa, in the 18th century most of the inhabitants of Aruba were indigenous who lived on the north coast, one of the largest communities lived in Alto Vista.

As they were very religious, they had a chief with the name of Antonio Silvester who guided them in the Christian life and it was he who decided to build a stone chapel with a roof of corn rods, which would serve as a place of prayer. In 1750 it was blessed by Father Algemesi who came from Coro-Venezuela and appointed Domingo Antonio Silvester as the island's first prosecutor in the name of the Spanish crown and Rome. In 1752 the prosecu-

tion passed into the hands of Antonio Silvester's son-in-law, Miguel Álvarez, who continued to guide the parishioners in their prayers.

According to the book, The History of Alto Vista by R.H. Nooyen, it is not known when Domingo Antonio Silvester came to Aruba from Venezuela. The elders believe Antonio was a Spaniard. In 1780, father Joseph Antonio de la Vega called Bernardino Silvester, one of Antonio's sons with his wife Anna Cathalina Tromp, "neighbors and naturals of the island Aruba" and thus they became natives.

At the end of the eighteen century many inhabitants of the island died as a result of

the black fever epidemic and since people believed that the Alto Vista area was the most infected, they began to build their homes further south within the Noord area, so the town of Noord began to grow into a community till getting its own Church. However religious festivals continued to be celebrated at this sacred native place, with the custom of arriving in procession to Alto Vista.

Two-hundred years after the beautiful time of Alto Vista, people can no longer see much of the town of Alto Vista from 1750. With a lot of work they found the old foundations of the Church of the Queen of the Holiest Rosary to build a new chapel on the same

place. The entire surrounding area was empty and desolated, making it hard to imagine that Alto Vista was a town at all. A hundred years later, people can see the remains of around twenty houses, some made of stone and others of clay. Nowadays, only around six of these houses remain.

South of the chapel in the yard two graves can be observed, there was the cemetery which father Pablo de Algemesi blessed. It is not certain, but it is believed that the two graves belong to Antonio Silvester and Miguel Alvarez, according to Nooyen. About 50 meters near the chapel there are still the markings

of an old house, where Antonio and Bernardino Silvester would have lived. About 200 meters from the chapel there is a water tank which the locals call Tanki Cacique. In the past this tank was closed. But mostly water was brought out from the Poz di Noord, a well dug in the sand.

The chapel can be viewed from basically any point in the north side, even from Paradera and Sero Plat. All the historical remains around the chapel provide us with an idea on how the old people of Alto Vista used to live. Don't miss the opportunity to visit a place of historical significance with a window to Aruba's past.□

Episode CXXX-130 Amulets and rituals

NOORD — Mangroves form transition vegetation from land to sea which offers great protection to tropical islands and continental shorelines, estuaries and lagoons of tropical latitudes areas, trees and shrubs that can grow below the maximum level of tides and are very tolerant to high salinity of sea water. Mangrove forests forms a separate and unique echo system on its own right.

Mangroves protect both the saltwater and the freshwater ecosystems they straddle. The mangroves' complex root systems filter nitrates and phosphates that rivers and streams carry to the sea. They also keep seawater from encroaching on inland waterways.

They act as a protective barrier between water and land, preventing coastal erosion and reducing the effect of waves and swells, especially during extreme weather events, being a powerful shield against

storms, hurricanes and tsunamis. According to experts, mangroves capture and store 34 million tons of carbon globally. A great contribution to the fight against climate change and global heat!

They promote biodiversity as they serve as a habitat in its entirety. Many types of fish, crabs, shrimp and mollusks inhabit its roots; birds also find a favorable habitat in the mangroves. They also provide spawning grounds for fish and crustaceans on nearby coral reefs and offer them shelter

during the early stages of life.

Mangrove forests provide many of the resources upon which coastal people depend for their survival and livelihood. At low tide, people can walk across the tidal flats to collect clams, shellfish, and shrimp. At high tide, fish move in to feed among the protection of mangrove roots, turning the marshy land into rich fishing grounds. The mangrove trees themselves provide fuel, medicines, tannins, and wood for building houses and boats.

Recent studies have shown that mangroves can be used for biotechnology. And due to its tolerance to salinity, the possibility of transferring genes taken from mangrove species to certain foods, such as rice, has been studied to develop new varieties of crops, generating new opportunities for coastal farmers. However we must also know keep in mind that mangroves are very susceptible to drastic change, delicate because they require an environment in balance to survive. This means that they require an appropriate concentration

of fresh and salt water to thrive.

The rise in sea level as a consequence of climate change causes a saline imbalance in the mangrove habitat that makes their survival difficult in addition to pollution caused by man and the overexploitation of resources. All this endangers these species, which are among the most diverse and productive in the world offering so many benefits that they undoubtedly deserve governmental commitment and our protection.

Fishermen of Southern Thailand Trang Province have a saying that goes like this "If there are no mangrove forests, the sea will have no meaning. It is like having a tree with no roots, for the mangroves are the roots of the sea."—

To get to know more about Aruba's origins, flora, fauna and cultural heritage, we recommend this private cultural encounter session that has been educating participants for decades. Mail us at etnianativa03@gmail.com or Whatsapp +297 592 2702 for an amazing native hour.□



Article by: Etnia Nativa

Whatsapp us +297 592 2702 and book your Aruban experience

Etnia Nativa is close to the high rise hotels



National Park Arikok: Aruba's biggest nature conservation



The National Park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There are numerous animals to discover, for example the sea turtle who lays his eggs on the park's beaches.

The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the island's past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities are available.

Did you know that four of the in total seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches? In the national park, a Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: a majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heads back to sea after laying her eggs, while another nest laid 2 months ago by the same female hatches—a very rare occurrence of daytime nesting and hatching. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

Nature Conservation

The protected area of National Park Arikok was of-

ficially established in 2000. Arikok National Park is a 34 square kilometers (7907 acres) of natural area, located at the north-eastern part of Aruba which contains examples of most of the island's flora and fauna against a backdrop of great geological complexity. We are proud to state that approximately 18% of the total land area of Aruba is assigned as a National Park, to protect and preserve the flora, fauna, geology and historical remains present within Arikok National Park.

The Landscape

There is a great geological variety within the park. The main aspects are the rough hills of the volcanic Aruba lava formation, the mysterious rocks of the batholithic quartz-diorite/tonalite, and the limestone rocks from fossilized coral. The two tallest hills on the island are situated within the park. Jamantia hill 188 meters (617 ft) and Arikok hill 176 meters (577 ft), from which the name of the park is derived.

The line of the permanently wind-and-wave beaten North Coast is broken by several bays (boca's). Most of them are small yet impressive inlets at the mouth of dry riverbeds. Some of these bays (boca's) are spectacular sights, adorned with white, sandy beaches and sand dunes, as is the case at Boca Prins and Dos Playa.

Arikok is also home to Conchi, Aruba's most important natural attraction; also

known as The Natural Pool. The journey to the Pool is and adventure by itself and only possible by foot, horse, ATV or 4x4 vehicle.

Cultural and Historical components

There are a number of sites within the park that attest to the history of Aruba. The Caquetío Indians left rock paintings in Cunucu Arikok and Fontein Cave. The bird drawing in the park logo is a copy of one of these historical artistic expressions.

Old plantation (Cunucus) sites tell the story of an active yet challenging agricultural past.

These Cunucus were also residential areas for the few families that worked the land. These families found



ways to survive in the difficult conditions, and were able to erect their homes with materials found in the area. Two of these adobe houses have been restored. Park rangers are learning many of the old building techniques in order to preserve this unique Aruban mud-house. At Cunucu Arikok and near Plantation Prins you can find these adobe houses.

Park Management

For the management of the park, a dedicated foundation "Fundacion Parque Nacional Arikok" (FPNA), known today as the Aruba National Park Foundation was established in July 2003. In February 2017, mangrove and wetland RAMSAR site #198 Spanish Lagoon was annexed to Arikok National Park due to its importance as a feeding and breeding

area for water birds and as a nursery area for a variety of marine organisms. With this addition, the areas under FPNA management increased by 70 hectares while the amount of species of flora and fauna to be conserved to over 250. On December 21st, 2018 (AB 2018 no. 77) Parke Marino Aruba – currently consisting of four marine protected areas (MPAs) – was officially established and subsequently brought under management of FPNA. In 2019 management plans will be established for the new MPAs which include: coral reefs, sea grass beds, mangrove systems, a large diversity of breeding seabirds. Parke Marino Aruba also contains potential shark nursery areas, endangered sea turtle nesting beaches and marine mammal nursery areas. □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 43 Western

1 — Major contest (Sirius setting)

6 May, e.g. 45 Chimney cleaner

11 Isolated corn-husker city

12 Romantic sort

14 Dance parties

15 Copying

16 Plane seat part

18 Ailing

19 Old hand

20 Use deceit

21 Laments loudly

23 Alternative to buttons

25 Research site

27 Indian honorific

28 Tycoon

30 Spill the beans

33 Brief time

34 Urgent call

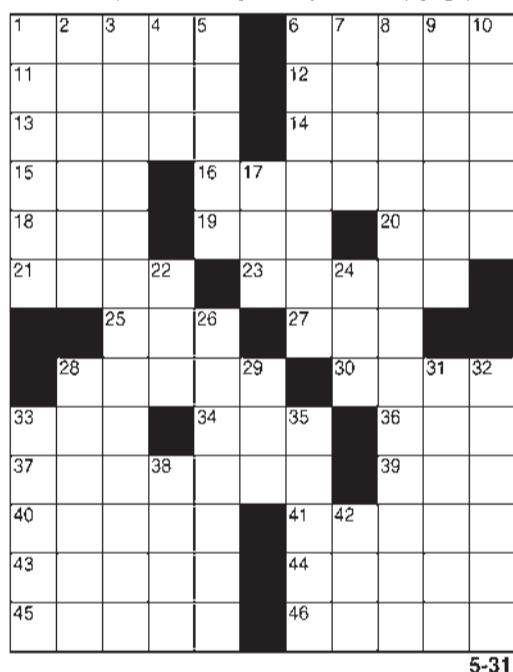
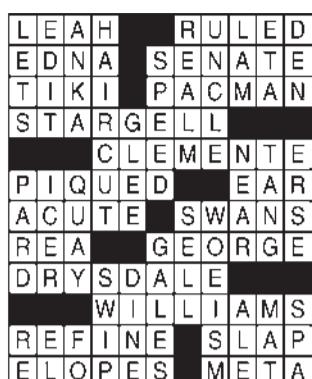
36 Fish eggs

37 Occupies

39 Cow's chew

40 Modify

41 Cake coating



AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

5-31 CRYPTOQUOTE

X HCG FNFPS IPKZ KD XTCFP

SKLIPHOR, FNFPS APFTCG SKL

CTRF, SKL'PF JKOOJCFI CK

CGF VFT. — VSYNHT FTPYF

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THERE'S A LOT OF US OUT HERE THAT ARE BIRDS, MAN. WE ALL NEED TO JUST FLY. — TRAVIS SCOTT

Cruise ship Schedule: June 01 - June 25 2024

		ARR	DEPT	BERTH
SAT	01	NORWEGIAN JADE	10.00	20.00
THU	06	CELEBRITY BEYOND	08.00	21.00
TUE	11	SILVER SHADOW	08.00	23.00
		ADVENTURE OF THE SEAS	08.00	20.00
		CARNIVAL MARDI GRAS	13.00	23.00
WED	12	CARNIVAL HORIZON	07.00	15.00
		RHAPSODY OF THE SEAS	09.00	21.00
TUE	18	CELEBRITY BEYOND	08.00	21.00
		CARNIVAL CELEBRATION	08.00	22.00
		CARNIVAL VISTA	13.00	23.00
TUE	25	CARNIVAL HORIZON	09.00	22.00

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic—but important—information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

lets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Supermarket hours



Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Electrical power



Drinking water



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety



Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

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IRS makes free tax return program permanent and is asking all states to join in 2025



A sign outside the Internal Revenue Service building is seen, May 4, 2021, in Washington. Associated Press

By FATIMA HUSSEIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The IRS said Thursday it will make permanent the free electronic tax return filing system that it experimented with this year and is asking all 50 states and the District of Columbia to help taxpayers file their returns through the program in 2025. The IRS tried the Direct File project for the 2024 tax season on a limited basis in 12 states for people with very simple W-2s, the employee's wage and tax statement.

The agency also is inviting

all states with a state income tax to sign up and help people file their state returns for free. During the 2024 pilot, tax agencies in Arizona, Massachusetts, California and New York helped people directly file their state taxes.

IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel said the IRS will report later this year on how many states plan to participate in the program in 2025.

The IRS was tasked with looking into how to create a "direct file" system as part of the money it received from the Inflation

Reduction Act signed into law by President Joe Biden in 2022. It gave the IRS nine months and \$15 million to report on how such a program would work.

"The IRS has been underfunded for decades, so taxpayers haven't gotten the support they deserve," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told reporters in a call Thursday. "Thanks

to the Inflation Reduction Act, we're changing this." The IRS is part of the Treasury Department. Since the Direct File trial began in March, more than 140,000 taxpayers used it to file their tax returns, claiming more than \$90 million in refunds, agency officials said.

Werfel said expanding the program will provide another filing option to taxpayers and "fits squarely into the IRS' effort to make taxes as easy as possible for Americans, including saving time and money." □

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Bus terminal

One Tech Tip: Want to turn off Meta AI? You can't but there are some workarounds

By BARBARA ORTUTAY

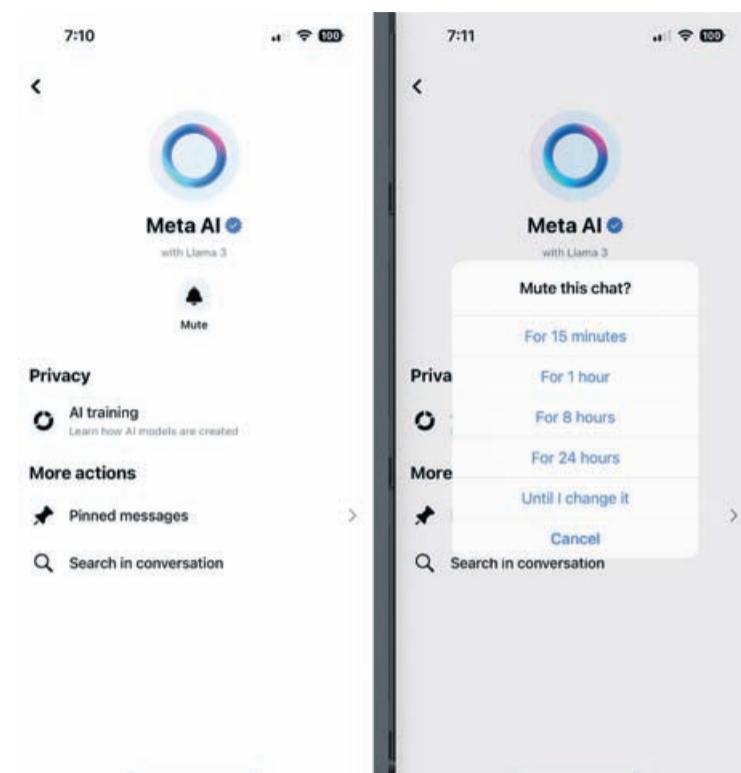
AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — If you use Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram, you've probably noticed a new character pop up answering search queries or eagerly offering tidbits of information in your feeds, with varying degrees of accuracy.

It's Meta AI, and it's here to help, at least according to Meta Platforms' CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who calls it "the most intelligent AI assistant that you can freely use."

The chatbot can recommend local restaurants, offer more information on something you see in a Facebook post, search for airline flights or generate images in the blink of an eye. If you're chatting with friends to plan a night out, you can invite it into your group conversation by typing @MetaAI, then ask it to recommend, say, cocktail bars.

Meta's AI tool has been integrated into chat boxes and search bars throughout the tech giant's platforms. The assistant appears, for example, at the top of your



Two screenshots taken from a smartphone on Thursday, May 30, 2024, show the steps needed to mute the "Ask Meta AI anything" chatbot on the Facebook and Instagram apps.

Associated Press

chat list on Messenger. Ask it questions about anything or to "imagine" something and it will generate a picture or animation.

As with any new technology, there are, of course, hiccups, including bizarre exchanges when the chatbots first started engaging with real people. One

joined a Facebook moms' group to talk about its gifted child. Another tried to give away nonexistent items to confused members of a Buy Nothing forum. Meta AI hasn't been universally welcomed. Here are some tips if you want to avoid using it:

CAN I TURN IT OFF?

Some Facebook users don't like the chatbot, complaining in online forums that they're tired of having AI foisted on them all the time or that they just want to stick with what they know. So what if you don't want Meta AI butting in every time you search for something or scroll through your social feeds? Well, you might need a time machine. Meta and other tech companies are in an AI arms race, churning out new language models and persuading some might say pressuring the public to use them.

The bad news is there's no one button to turn off Meta AI on Facebook, Instagram, Messenger or WhatsApp. However, if you want to limit it, there are some (imperfect) workarounds.

MUTE...SORT OF

On the Facebook mobile app, tap the "search" button. You may get a prompt to "Ask Meta AI anything." Tap the blue triangle on the right, then the blue circle with an "i" inside it. Here, you'll see a "mute" button, with options to silence the chatbot for 15 minutes or longer, or "Until I change

it." You can do the same on Instagram.

Nonetheless, muting doesn't get rid of Meta AI completely. Meta AI's circle logo might still appear where the search magnifying glass used to be and tapping on it will take you to the Meta AI field. This is now the new way to search in Meta, and just as with Google's AI summaries, the responses will be generated by AI.

I asked the chatbot about searching Facebook without Meta AI results.

"Meta AI aims to be a helpful assistant and is in the search bar to assist with your questions," it responded. Then it added, "You can't disable it from this experience, but you can tap the search button after writing your query and search how you normally would."

Then I asked a (human) Meta spokesperson.

"You can search how you normally would and choose to engage with a variety of results ones from Meta AI or others that appear as you type," the spokesperson said in a statement. □

OpenAI forms safety committee as it starts training latest artificial intelligence model

Associated Press

OpenAI says it's setting up a safety and security committee and has begun training a new AI model to supplant the GPT-4 system that underpins its ChatGPT chatbot. The San Francisco startup said in a blog post Tuesday that the committee will advise the full board on "critical safety and security decisions" for its projects and operations. The safety committee arrives as debate swirls around AI safety at the company, which was thrust into the spotlight after a researcher, Jan Leike, resigned and leveled criticism at OpenAI for letting safety "take a backseat

to shiny products." OpenAI co-founder and chief scientist Ilya Sutskever also resigned, and the company

disbanded the "superalignment" team focused on AI risks that they jointly led. Leike said Tuesday he's



The OpenAI logo is seen displayed on a cell phone with an image on a computer monitor generated by ChatGPT's Dall-E text-to-image model, Friday, Dec. 8, 2023, in Boston.

Associated Press

joining rival AI company Anthropic, founded by ex-OpenAI leaders, to "continue the superalignment mission" there.

OpenAI said it has "recently begun training its next frontier model" and its AI models lead the industry on capability and safety, though it made no mention of the controversy. "We welcome a robust debate at this important moment," the company said.

AI models are prediction systems that are trained on vast datasets to generate on-demand text, images, video and human-like conversation. Frontier models are the most powerful, cutting edge AI systems.

The safety committee is filled with company insiders, including OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Chairman Bret Taylor, and four OpenAI technical and policy experts. It also includes board members Adam D'Angelo, who's the CEO of Quora, and Nicole Seligman, a former Sony general counsel. The committee's first job will be to evaluate and further develop OpenAI's processes and safeguards and make its recommendations to the board in 90 days. The company said it will then publicly release the recommendations it's adopting "in a manner that is consistent with safety and security." □

Being an MLB catcher is grueling work. That's not slowing this year's best on offense

By STEVE MEGARGEE

AP Sports Writer

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Slowed by stiff knees and bruised by foul balls and backswings, major league catchers have long been defined by what they do defensively — even if it hinders them on offense. Perhaps because of the universal designated hitter and strategic changes like one-knee squatting, that might be changing.

Major league catchers have an average OPS of .691 through Wednesday, not far from the league-wide average of .697 for players at all positions. A season hasn't ended with catchers having a higher average OPS than the league-wide mark since 1879. The closest it's come to happening since 1900 was in 1977, when catchers were at .733 while the league average was .741.

"When you have a young group of catchers like we do in our game right now, talented catchers in our game right now, you're going to see this," said Cleveland Guardians manager Stephen Vogt, who caught in the majors from 2012-22. "The catching position is probably as good as it's been in years, for sure."

Leading the way are Kansas City's Salvador Perez (.923), Milwaukee's William Contreras (.903), the Los Angeles Dodgers' Will Smith (.876), Baltimore's Adley Rutschman (.815), Philadelphia's J.T. Realmuto (.781) and Colorado's Elias Díaz (.774). No catcher has ended a year with an OPS of .900 or higher with at least 502 plate appearances since San Francisco's Buster Posey at .957 in 2012.

Given the demanding nature of the position, it's reasonable to expect catchers' hitting production to tumble in the second half. Pittsburgh Pirates manager Derek Shelton, a former minor league catcher and major league hitting coach, says he believes it will level off. New York Yankees catcher Jose Trevino said it's hard to predict what might happen but



Milwaukee Brewers' William Contreras rounds the bases after hitting a three-run home run against the Houston Astros during the fifth inning of a baseball game Saturday, May 18, 2024, in Houston.

Associated Press

acknowledged the toll the position takes.

"It's going to wear you down just because of the workload, right?" Trevino said. "So, yeah, I think normally it's going to have an effect on you for sure."

Yet some catchers, such as the Contreras brothers, have bucked the trend.

Contreras caught a career-high 108 games for Milwaukee last year, yet his OPS improved from .773 in the first half to .873 in the second. Contreras is the younger brother of injured St. Louis Cardinals catcher Willson Contreras, a three-time All-Star whose OPS went from .754 in the first half to .959 in the second half last year. Willson Contreras is out at least six weeks after a swing by the Mets' J.D. Martinez broke his left forearm.

One possible reason for the improvement: More and more backstops in recent seasons have eschewed the traditional catchers squat for a one-knee down stance in order to improve their pitch framing. Vogt thinks the change has also helped limit the stress on their legs.

"They're going to be able to play more," Vogt said. "They're going to be able to play a lot longer. They're not going to take the pound-

ing and the wear and tear in their knees and hips and back like a lot of the traditional catchers did."

Fox analyst A.J. Pierzynski, who caught in the majors from 1998-2016, downplayed the impact of the one-knee-down approach on catchers' improved hitting. Pierzynski points out that catchers still face plenty of challenges physically and mentally.

"It does take some strain off of you, but you still get foul balls, you still get a lot of the same stuff," Pierzynski said. Pierzynski says a bigger factor is the way catchers are being used. The National League's adoption of the designated hitter in 2022 makes it easier for catchers to stay in the lineup even when they aren't behind the plate.

That means players aren't having to catch as many games.

The only player to work behind the plate in at least 130 games either of the last two seasons is Realmuto, who caught 133 games each of those years. By contrast, at least four players caught 130-plus games every year from 2011-14.

Yet the best hitting catchers are actually in the lineup more often than before. William Contreras, whose

.323 batting average ranks fifth in the NL, says his occasional DH assignments have helped him stay in a rhythm at the plate.

"When there was no DH in the National League, your days off were kind of your days off," Contreras said through an interpreter. "Now we're kind of able to treat my DH days as my days off and we're able to keep my bat in the lineup for the team. It definitely helps."

Rutschman has thrived as a DH, with a 1.033 OPS in 18 games there compared to a .691 OPS when he's catching.

Pierzynski said players such as the Contreras brothers, Rutschman or Perez also can stay fresher at the plate during their non-catching days because they get a break from having to concentrate on how to handle a pitching staff or how to attack an opposing lineup on those days.

"Let's say you're Adley Rutschman," Pierzynski said. "(You're thinking), 'How are we going to get Aaron Judge out today? Guess what, I don't have to worry about it because I'm a DH. All I've got to do is worry about is how I'm going to get a hit and drive in some runs for these guys.'"

Teams with the best offensive catchers have capitalized on this opportunity.

Perez has missed just two games and Rutschman has sat out just three this season.

Perez and Rutschman have missed just two games each this season. Perez has 13 starts at first base and seven at DH. Rutschman has 32 starts and 34 overall appearances as a catcher. William Contreras hasn't missed a game since Aug. 20 of last season.

"It's just something that mutually we've gotten to this point in the season playing pretty well, and I'm feeling really good," said Contreras, who had made 45 starts at catcher and 10 at DH through Wednesday.

"I don't think I'm ready for that day off yet. That's what I come to the stadium every day for, is to come and get my body ready to play and to be out there and play the game."

"At this point, we're going to kind of keep doing it. Maybe down the line, there will be a day off in there."

The hitting surge from catchers comes at an ideal time.

An automated ball-strike system is being used at the Triple-A level for a second straight season, raising the possibility that it eventually could reach the majors. It will become more essential for catchers to provide offense if pitch framing becomes less important.

The emergence of players such as Contreras and Rutschman has helped alter the league-wide perception of catchers, a shift that should continue to take hold even if they don't maintain this history-making pace at the plate.

"The catching position has definitely changed," Pierzynski said. "It's definitely becoming a more offensive position. If you can find a catcher who can give you DH days and can throw a little bit, frame a pitch here and there but also be an offensive force, that's value." □



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Kentucky Derby winner and Preakness runner-up Mystik Dan on track to run in the Belmont at Saratoga

By STEPHEN WHYNO

AP Sports Writer

Kentucky Derby winner and Preakness runner-up Mystik Dan is on track to run in the third leg of the Triple Crown, the Belmont Stakes at Saratoga on June 8, trainer Kenny McPeek said Thursday.

McPeek is not yet ready to commit to entering Mystik Dan, much like he waited on his decision in the Preakness, but he figures to make the call by the end of the weekend.

"We want to run," McPeek said on a conference call with reporters hosted by the National Thoroughbred Racing Association. "We do. We've just got to make sure that all boxes are checked and T's are crossed and I's are dotted."

Mystik Dan in the Belmont would set up a rematch against Derby second-



Brian Hernandez, Jr., atop Mystik Dan, looks on after finishing second in the running of the Preakness Stakes horse race at Pimlico Race Course, Saturday, May 18, 2024, in Baltimore.

Associated Press

place finisher Sierra Leone and Preakness winner Seize the Grey, who are also likely to be in the field. He would be the first horse since War of Will five years ago to take part in all three Triple Crown races, a rarity for those who don't win each of the first two. McPeek's confidence

comes from how well Mystik Dan came out of the Preakness on May 18 and handled the track at Saratoga Race Course since vanishing there a couple of days afterward.

"The horse has been in a happy routine up to now," McPeek said. "He doesn't act up. He simply goes

about his work every day, and he's very uneventful. The only thing he does fast is breeze and race, so we're going to keep an eye on that. I need to see a good work out of him, I need to see him eat up good and I'd like to see his bloodwork come back flawless."

If Mystik Dan is not Belmont-bound, McPeek intends to run Kentucky Oaks-winning filly Thorpedo Anna against the colts. Only 24 fillies have run in the Belmont and three have won Ruthless in 1867, Tanya in 1905 and Rags to Riches in 2007 the race that is traditionally contested at 1 1/2 miles.

"(She has) the high-level talent," McPeek said. "She won the Oaks so easily, and I do think she would be capable of being very competitive against the colts. But we're not going to run them against each other." The Belmont will be 1 1/4

miles this year because of the shape of the track at Saratoga, which is home to the race this year and next because the final Triple Crown leg's traditional home downstate in New York is undergoing a \$455 million reconstruction. The shorter distance is a big reason why McPeek is considering Mystik Dan for a third major race in five weeks.

Same goes for Chad Brown-trained Sierra Leone, who finished a nose back in the Derby, and 88-year-old Hall of Famer D. Wayne Lukas' Seize the Grey.

"The horse has been training great," Brown said of Sierra Leone, who will have a new jockey in Flavien Prat. "He bounced out of the Kentucky Derby in really good order."

I've been very pleased with how he's training at Saratoga. □